

November 15, 2006

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Robin Phillips, Executive Director  
Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation

FROM: Anne Fennessy and Kris Jorgensen

RE: Stakeholder Research Themes and Findings

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Cocker Fennessy was retained by the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) to perform stakeholder research to identify opportunities and challenges for both special needs transportation and ACCT, including what ACCT's future might be.

The purpose of this information-gathering was to assist ACCT in answering questions such as:

- Is there a need for ACCT to continue in the future? If so, what would it look like, and what role would it play?
- How can ACCT better support special-needs transportation?
- What are the priority issues?
- How should ACCT change?
- How can special needs transportation coordination be improved?

Cocker Fennessy gathered information by conducting two outreach efforts:

- Independent-opinion-leader interviews (25)
- Facilitated discussion with ACCT members

This memo highlights the themes and findings from the stakeholder interviews.

### Overall Themes

*The following statements were common views that were expressed by nearly all of the interview participants.*

1. The mission of ACCT—to coordinate and improve transportation services for special needs communities—is well understood and viewed as necessary.
2. ACCT should be continued. There is support for enacting a strong legislative mandate as well as full commitment from key players—Governor, Legislature, and major

agencies. Participants said that without that mandate, commitment and participation, ACCT's ability to make improvements to special needs transportation is greatly compromised.

3. ACCT is currently under-funded and under-staffed. There is a desire for providing sufficient, sustained and reliable funding for ACCT's internal operations, its grant making abilities, and for special needs transportation services generally.
4. Performance measures should be developed and implemented. Participants said that ACCT needs to develop performance measures and indicators for the work it is coordinating. They feel measures are will help inform and drive policy decisions and they will demonstrate the benefits of coordination.
5. Streamlining and improving the bureaucracy of the overall special needs transportation system is necessary. Interviews stated that the many different requirements, regulations, funding mechanisms, etc. create artificial barriers that prevent many resources from being fully used. An example used by many interview participants was the inability to utilize school buses for other types of trips.

### **Findings from the Interviews**

*The following findings are conclusions and assessments based on what was heard in the stakeholder interviews.*

### **Perceptions of ACCT and its Role**

1. All interviewees were very familiar with ACCT and its mission.
2. Interviewees felt ACCT has been successful and should be continued. They also believed that much more can and needs to be done.
3. A few interviewees said that a focus of ACCT should be improving institutional infrastructure so that at some point in the future, ACCT will not be necessary. The issues ACCT coordinates would inherently be a part of how agencies and institutions operate.
4. Some interviewees said ACCT is viewed as a national model program and that Washington State is ahead of the rest of the country in terms of coordinating special needs transportation. However, they believe that there is still room for improvement.

### **Priority Issues for ACCT and Special Needs Transportation**

5. Most interviewees felt that a number one priority is to continue providing coordination and improving the communication and efficiencies among all the various groups involved in special needs transportation.
6. Interviewees prioritized legislative advocacy. They wanted ACCT to continue to promote legislation that removes barriers to transportation.

7. Participants hoped that ACCT will continue to be a resource contact—to provide education and technical support, especially for those organizations that don't have resources of their own. They also wanted ACCT to educate those who are not as well-versed in special needs transportation issues. ACCT should be building awareness and support about the need for these services.
8. Some voiced concerns about meeting current and future social needs (preparing for the baby boomers generation). They predicted a need to increase transportation options and education about how to use the systems.

### **Structure and Membership of ACCT**

9. Some said that changes in government structures are necessary versus structural changes to ACCT. Many expressed frustration with the way the overall system is structured. They said that there are too many different rules, requirements and regulations at many different jurisdictional levels. They said that because of these constraints, many resources are not fully being used. Territorial issues and artificial borders impede success.
10. Many mentioned that it is difficult to coordinate with school districts and that there is a need and major benefits to matching up the available resources of school buses with the needs of the elderly, disabled and others within the special needs community.
11. People expressed mixed feelings about where ACCT should be housed—within WSDOT or possibly in another state agency. Some wondered if ACCT would be more effective under the Office of the Governor or the Secretary of State.
12. Individuals suggested the following additions to the council:
  - Directors from major federal, state and local agencies
  - Washington state Transportation commissioners
  - Community, Trade and Economic Development representatives
  - Union representatives
  - Private sector representatives
  - Non-profit organizations like Goodwill who employ special needs populations
13. Some recommended that ACCT develop a rigorous orientation for new council members, including roles and responsibilities, commitment, prioritizing wider state concerns over narrow local concerns, etc.

### **Suggestions for Increasing ACCT's Success**

14. Nearly all those interviewed expressed strong support for ACCT's continuation.
15. Nearly all interviewees mentioned the need for a more comprehensive and powerful ACCT. They said that with the following improvements, ACCT would be much more successful:
  - A stronger legislative mandate including:

- ✓ Major state agencies should be required to participate in ACCT and include transportation as a fundamental part of their programs.
  - ✓ Coordination should be required performance measure for agencies, and required in grant applications.
  - Full commitment and participation from a political leaders and major agency players including:
    - ✓ Governor
    - ✓ Legislators
    - ✓ WSDOT
    - ✓ DSHS
    - ✓ OSPI
    - ✓ Medicaid
  - Adequate, sustained and reliable funding for ACCT's internal operations and its ability to pilot innovative ideas.
16. Most interviewees said that ACCT should develop better performance measures and indicators for the work it is coordinating. This information would help inform and drive policy choices, and it would demonstrate the benefits of coordination.
17. Some suggested that ACCT work hard to develop legislative champions by:
- Encouraging local coalitions to work with their legislators directly. This would, at the very least, get more legislators familiar with the issues and the benefits of ACCT.
  - Taking legislators on field trips/tours during interim. This would allow special needs transportation advocates to make person connections with legislators and legislators would see the issues first-hand.
18. A few raised questions about whether the new federal requirements (SAFETEA-LU) are duplicative of ACCT. Some voiced concerns about how the requirements will impact current efforts to coordinate special needs transportation at all levels.
19. Some mentioned that ACCT needs a clearer vision and common goals.
20. Some interviewees said ACCT should show bold leadership and a willingness to shake up the system. They felt a hesitation for many to acknowledgment that the system needs major change.